

## *United States Commission for the Preservation Of America's Heritage Abroad*

### Important Commission Calendar Dates:

October 28, 1998

(*Tentative*) Joint Commission Ukrainian Meeting, Time/Place TBD

November 2, 1998

(*Confirmed*) Full Commission Meeting, Time/Place TBD

### Great Progress in Ukraine

Since the break-up of the Soviet Union, Ukraine has embarked on a program of privatization of public properties, which under Ukraine law, includes most Jewish cemeteries. In order to stop this practice that has endangered several historic Jewish cemeteries, the Commission invoked the requirements for formal negotiations on protection for cemeteries under the Agreement for the Protection and Preservation of Cultural Heritage signed by President Kravchuk and Secretary of State Warren Christopher in 1994.

For the past two years the Commission, working with the White House under the leadership of Vice President Al Gore and the Department of State, have negotiated for a total and permanent cessation of any privatization and inappropriate activities at Jewish cemeteries. This work has proceeded under the supervision of Commissioner Irving Stolberg and Commissioner Chaskel Besser. The Commissioners were greatly assisted by Professor Harry Reicher of Agudath Israel and Department of State Ukraine Desk Staff Jack Segal and

### Success In The Baltics

#### • *Estonia*

Adding another success story to the Commission's files was the recent signing of a Declaration of Cooperation between the United States and the Republic of Estonia. Commission Baltic Sub-Committee Co-Chairmen, Commissioner Joe Halfon and Commissioner Gary Lavine were extremely pleased to have signed the Declaration on behalf of the United States.

The signing, which took place on June 25, 1998 at the Estonian Embassy, was the culmination of negotiations that began in 1993. The ceremony was very well attended as it took place prior to a reception in honor of Minister of Culture, Jaak Allik, who signed for the Estonians. Also in attendance was Ambassador Kalev Stoicescu.

Chairman Lewan sent a letter to Ambassador Stoicescu

on July 6 expressing how delighted he is that the Declaration has been signed, and that he hopes our countries can soon discuss signing the full Agreement. The Embassy responded in early August that the Ambassador would like to meet with Chairman Lewan in the near future to talk about the next step.

#### • *Lithuania*

Following the lead of its Baltic neighbor the Republic of Lithuania signed a Declaration of Cooperation on June 26, 1998 at the Lithuanian Embassy. Commissioners Warren Miller and Phyllis Kaminsky signed the Declaration on behalf of the United States, and Minister of Culture Saulius Saltenis signed on behalf of the Republic of Lithuania. Another large audience attended the signing since, as with the Estonian signing, it took

place prior to a reception in honor of the Minister of Culture.

Ambassador Sakalauskas has conveyed how pleased he is that the Declaration has become a reality. He stated that his government is very interested in moving forward with signing the full Agreement.

#### • *Latvia*

Hopeful that one day a success story may be written about Latvia, the Commission has taken the first step toward encouraging the Latvians to follow the lead of Lithuania and Estonia. A letter from Chairman Lewan, copies of a Declaration and the full Agreement, were mailed to Latvian Ambassador Ojars Kalnins on July 10.

Nick Greanias. Their combined efforts have culminated in Executive Order No. 604-p, issued by the Cabinet of Ministers of Ukraine on July 20, 1998 that bans any construction on lands with traces of ancient burials, as well as the lands of closed cemeteries. The Commission thanks Ambassador Shcherbak, the Ukrainian Embassy and the Ukrainian Government for taking such a positive step. Additionally, it was extremely pleased to have Vice President Al Gore receive the Order on behalf of the United States while he was traveling in the Ukraine.

### Commission Assists Tarnow Martyr's Cemetery

Access to the Martyr's Cemetery in Tarnow, Poland is now available thanks to the leadership of Commissioner Rabbi Chaskel Besser. Rabbi Besser secured a \$10,000 donation for the construction of a pathway leading to the cemetery. The pathway, which was completed in July, was greatly needed as the cemetery is located in a forest.

## Chairman Lewan Visits Poland

During the first week of August, Chairman Lewan traveled to Poland on Commission business. Part of his trip involved the successful mediation of a problem at the Remu Cemetery in Krakow involving the reburial of bones. This very serious and delicate matter was brought to the Commission's attention by Commissioner Rabbi Zvi Kestenbaum and Rabbi Lazar Stern, head of Athra Kadisha.

Chairman Lewan, with assistance from U.S. Consul General Francis Scanlon and his Deputy, Paula Thiede, established lines of communication between the Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe and the Krakow Jewish Community President. After meeting with the Jewish Community President, he departed Krakow with his assurance that the bones would be properly reburied. Representatives of the Committee for the Preservation of Jewish Cemeteries in Europe were very pleased with the success of the Commission's efforts.

### • *Wyszkow*

An entire afternoon during his trip was devoted to visiting the memorial and cemetery at Wyszkow. He was accompanied by Ambassador Daniel Fried and Lena Bergman of the Jewish Historical Institute of Warsaw. They had very successful meetings with the Mayor of Wyszkow Jan Malinowski, Dean Wojciech Borkowski and Father Henry Kwietlinski, both of the Catholic Church. Chairman Lewan was very pleased to learn from the Mayor, Dean Borkowski and Father Kwietlinski that numerous visitors from the United States and Israel have visited Wyszkow.

Chairman Lewan has reported that the grounds of the cemetery are in excellent condition and the memorial has not been damaged. Since the September 1997 dedication, a fence around the cemetery has been constructed, the approaches to

the monument have been upgraded and stabilized, and a water line will soon be connected to maintain the landscaping. In addition, a perpetual care contract was recently signed. The fact that the cemetery has been so well maintained is due in large part to the successful fundraising efforts conducted by Commissioner Lee Seeman.

Moreover, since the dedication she has secured donations from two additional sponsoring families. A special note of thanks must also be made to the most significant sponsor of Wyszkow, Costa Rican Ambassador Jaime Darenblum.

### • *Kalisz and Miehllec*

Thanks to the tireless efforts of former Commissioner Hertz Frankel, the historic Kalisz Jewish cemetery remains the highest priority to the Jewish community, the U.S. Embassy and most importantly, the Polish national government. Recently, Under Secretary of State Stuart Eizenstat raised this matter with the office of the Prime Minister who promised speedy resolution.

While in Poland, Chairman Lewan discussed the long-standing problems that exist in regard to the cemeteries in Kalisz and Miehllec with Marek Siwiec, the Chief of National Security and Andre Chohara, the Director of the Office of Religion. While complicated by the presence of a school for handicapped children on the historic Kalisz cemetery site, a fair and reasonable solution appears on the horizon.

As to Miehllec, the extraordinary efforts of Commissioner Edgar Gluck have brought this closer to resolution. Mr. Lewan met in Krakow with Mr. Tadeusz Jakubowicz, the President of the regional Jewish community. This meeting achieved a strategy for the return of the cemetery to Jewish control and for allowing the government to find a cost effective way to relocate the small business that

occupies the site. Consul Scanlon and his Deputy, Paula Thiede, will watch this process closely over the next few weeks.

### • *Oswiecim*

Perhaps the best news out of Poland is the remarkable success of the Oswiecim Jewish Study Center headed by New York businessman, Fred Schwartz. The old synagogue in the town, just minutes away from the death camp, has been returned to the Jewish community - the first since 1938! Mr. Schwartz has assembled a first-rate team that includes among others world renowned architect Arthur Rosenblatt, former Ambassador Nicholas Rey, lawyer and corporate executive James Schreiber and historian Michael Berenbaum.

Finally, the Center's Executive Director, Daniel Eisenstadt is a remarkably gifted young man who has led the effort to engage the Polish government, the Oswiecim leadership and political and spiritual leaders from Poland, the United States and Israel.

A rededication of the synagogue, which is being co-sponsored by the Commission, is planned for early November and no less than Poland's President Alexander Kwasniewski will be in attendance. This will be one of the events on the long road to Polish-Jewish reconciliation. Commissioner Lee Seeman is coordinating this event for the Commission.

Also included in Chairman Lewan's trip to Poland were meetings with U.S. Consul General Francis Scanlon; Leader of the Union of Jewish Congregations in Poland Jerzy Kichler; Chief of National Security Marek Siwiec; Ambassador and Liaison with the Jewish Diaspora Krzysztof Sliwinski; Bishop Tadeusz Rakoczy; Polish-Israeli Parliamentary Group Chairman Andrzej Folwarczny; and Secretary General of the Council for the Protection of Memory of Combat and Martyrdom Andrzej Przewoznik.

## Meeting with President Highlights Chairman's Trip To Lithuania

Prior to arriving in Poland during his July visit, Chairman Lewan visited with various government and community leaders in Lithuania. Highlighting his trip was a meeting with the President of Lithuania, Valdas Adamkus, who stated that he wants to be "very helpful" to the Commission, and he looks forward to signing a full Agreement later this year.

Chairman Lewan was personally invited to make the trip by the Lithuanian Ambassador, Stasys Sakalauskas, whom he met with on July 14. He returned with a positive review of the assistance the country is providing to the Jewish community, despite the fact that it does not have a restitution law. Moreover, the Lithuanian government has promised to return a vast majority of communal property seized since 1938.

Other individuals he met with include: Chabad Lubavich Rabbi Krinsky, Minister of Culture Saulius Saltenis, Ambassador Sakalauskas, Vice Minister of Foreign Affairs Rokas Bernotas, President of the Lithuanian Jewish Community Simonas Alperavicius, Chairman of the Jewish Religious Community Mr. Gilinsky, and various Yiddish language scholars from Britain and the United States.

## Auschwitz Book Project

Commissioner Warren Miller is raising funds to cover the cost of translating into English a five volume (1,250 page) authoritative treatise on the history of Auschwitz-Buchenwald. The treatise has been published in Polish and German by the historians of the State Museum at Auschwitz. The books are scheduled to be published in early 1999. Commissioner Miller has raised a substantial amount of funds for this project.

## Status of Buchenwald (Little Camp) Memorial

After waiting three years and submitting numerous revisions of the original plans, Commissioner Warren Miller and world renowned architect Stephen Jacobs, who is donating his services, finally received confirmation in June that the Curatorial Council (comprised of 15 German historians) of the Foundation of Buchenwald and Mittelbau-Dora Memorials has approved the final plans for a memorial on the site of the former Little Camp.

Construction permits and other related authorization are being applied for to local authorities, and fundraising for the memorial will commence in the immediate future.

## Swiss Bank Restitution

While not within the jurisdiction of the Commission, the historic settlement between the Swiss banks and the World Jewish Congress is worth noting and praising. Special plaudits go to Under Secretary of State Stuart Eisenstat whose dedication to finding the truth by establishing real facts was essential and extraordinary.

Also, the resolve of Edgar Bronfman, Israel Singer and Kalman Sultanik of the WJC and so many other heroes make this "rough justice" possible. Finally, it must be noted that without the vision and hard work of U.S. Senator Al D'Amato little success would have been possible. His compassion and commitment to those who suffered and survived is beyond compare.

## Bulgaria: Very Interested in Cooperation with Commission

The first step toward a relationship with Bulgaria was taken on July 29. Chairman Lewan and Commissioner Ned Bandler met with Bulgarian Ambassador and Permanent Representative to the United Nations Philip Dimitrov. They presented the Ambassador with copies of a Declaration of Cooperation and a full Agreement. He expressed a strong interest in having his country become involved in the Commission's work. Chairman Lewan and Commissioner Bandler are hopeful that a full Agreement will be signed very soon.

## Uzbekistan: Talks Have Begun

A very successful meeting took place in July between Chairman Lewan, Commissioner Phyllis Kaminisky and Uzbekistan Ambassador Sodyq Safaev. Ambassador Safaev expressed that his country is quite anxious to assist the Commission with its work.

Among the items discussed at the meeting was a possible lunch or dinner fundraiser at the Embassy in mid-November to solicit funds for a monument in Tashkent to Jews who were saved by the Uzbekistan people. The president of Uzbekistan has already designated a location for the memorial. In addition, the Ambassador stated that he is very interested in signing a Declaration of Cooperation in the next few months, and hopes that the full Agreement can be signed by the end of the year.

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## Commission Assists Republic of Slovenia

The Slovenian Embassy contacted the Commission in mid-June, and asked that it assist two Slovenian researchers who would be traveling through the United States in early July. The researchers, Mr. Mitja Ferenc and Mr. Gojko Zupan, are both Counselors to the Director of the Authority of Slovenia for Cultural Heritage. The purpose of their trip was to document historic buildings that relate to Slovenian-American heritage.

The Embassy invoked the reciprocal aspects of the U.S.-Slovenian Agreement on Protection and Preservation, which its government signed with the Commission, to assist the researchers with documenting sites and investigating historic landmark designation. New Commission employee, Beth Bellizzi, arranged for the researchers to visit sites and hold meetings with National Historic Landmarks Office state officials in New York, Colorado, Michigan and Ohio. Commissioner Joe Halfon and Research Director Dr. Sam Gruber met with the researchers upon their arrival in New York and accompanied them on site visits.

The Embassy stated that Mr. Gojko and Mr. Zupan were extremely pleased with the assistance that was provided by the Commission, and they greatly appreciated Commissioner Halfon and Dr. Gruber's attendance on their tour of Ellis Island. Furthermore, the researchers stated that because of the Commission's assistance they were able to document far more information than they had thought possible.

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On a related note, Chairman Lewan and Commissioner Kaminsky met with the new U.S. Ambassador to Slovenia, Nancy Ely-Raphel, on August 11 in Washington. Ambassador Ely-Raphel expressed a strong interest in working with the Commission, and Chairman Lewan stated that the Commission looks forward to a close relationship with her.

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## Status of Surveys

**Ukraine:** The survey of Jewish cemeteries and massacre sites of Ukraine has been underway for since 1995, but delayed by funding constraints. With the passage of the new protective law by the Government of Ukraine (see "Great Progress in Ukraine"), completion of this work becomes essential for the protection of the cemeteries. This is because most land records on the cemeteries have long been lost, so those undocumented cemeteries, will not be afforded protection. In fact, the Commission was faced with substantial delays in completing the 600 as yet to be visited sites due to funding problems. This has been rectified by a timely grant of funds obtained by Commissioner Besser from the Ronald S. Lauder Foundation.

**Romania:** Plans for documenting the Jewish cemeteries of Romania have been designed by Research Director, Dr. Sam Gruber. Contracts for the work are currently being negotiated. Work is scheduled to begin in August 1998, collating existing data and initiating new site visits to cemeteries in Transylvania. This part of the project is being coordinated by researchers at the Institute of Jewish Studies and Jewish History "Dr. Moshe Carmilly," part of the Babes-Bolyai University Cluj-Napoca. Local project directors are Dr. Mircea Moldovan and Dr. Ladislau Gyemant. The Cluj-based team has identified 470 cemeteries and 63 synagogues to be documented in Transylvania. Project Director Gruber is developing similar projects for the rest of Romania including Moldavia/Bukovia and Bucharest/Walachia.

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## Commission Staff Changes

The Commission welcomes Beth Bellizzi as its new Project Officer. Beth previously served as U.S. Senator Joseph Lieberman's Connecticut Media Scheduler. She received a B.A. in Political Science from the College of New Rochelle and holds a M.A. in Communication from the University of Hartford. In June, long-time Project Officer Bertha Tompkins ended her employment with the Commission. We greatly appreciate her dedicated efforts and wish her all the best.

## Armenia: Close To An Agreement

Thanks to the tireless efforts of Commissioner Alice Kelikian, it appears that an Agreement with the Republic of Armenia may be signed in the next few months. The goal is to have an approved Agreement ready for signing when the President of Armenia visits Washington, D.C. in September 1998.

## The Commission Is On The Web

Information about Commission's current projects is now available on the World Wide Web by typing: [www.preservationcommission.org](http://www.preservationcommission.org). The web site, which has been in operation since early 1998, provides information about the Commission's activities, the complete text of its Annual Report, information about cemetery surveys, the AJGS Cemeteries Project, World Monument's Priorities for Restoration of Jewish Monuments, Jewish museums and referrals to other preservation-related web sites.

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